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ABSTRACT

Scholars studying organizational communication tend to feel that all organizational problems are rooted in communication, but it is difficult to diagnose the particular problems of an organization without an explicit model of what constitutes a healthy organization. Organizational effectiveness is goal-related, multidimensional, perceived differently by individuals, and time-dependent. Organizational effectiveness is the extent to which an organization is meeting its goals, whatever they may be. A four-part model of organizational communication analysis shows how communication is interrelated with many other factors influencing effectiveness, suggesting that communication strategies should be developed around these factors rather than being predetermined and packaged. The advantages of this model are that it is tailored to individual companies, it considers constraints that may inhibit goal achievement, it emphasizes the link between communication and end products of an organization, and it recognizes the cyclical nature and temporality of communication programs. The major implication in this model is the need for research that specifies the organizational outcomes of effective communication. (HTH)

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COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS: MODEL FOR THE ANALYSIS OF ORGANIZATIONS

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COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

The past few years have seen a dramatic shift in focus in the field of organizational communication. In the past organizational communication study focused on problems, or on the unhealthy parts of the organization. Rogers and Rogers (1976) comment on this preoccupation with problems, and also on the tendency of organizational communication scholars to feel that all organizational problems are rooted in communication:

> Much attention in the literature about organizations has been given to communication problems; in fact, reading these publications gives one the impression that insufficient communication is frequently the main cause of difficulties in the organization. (p. 23).

However, many scholars have found it difficult to diagnose particular problems of the organization without having an explicit model of what a healthy organization is. It is appropriate that we use a medical analogy in describing this shift of focus, since the change in perspective parallels changes in the medical field. For example, the mental health field has shifted from an emphasis on mental disorders to a concern for adequate models of the mentally healthy individual. Medicine has shifted from its crisis orientation to a focus on preventive medicine, in which doctors specify the properties of health and how to maintain it.

Criticism from management professionals and others has goaded communication scholars to reformulate their approach to the study of organizations. This criticism has also caused scholars to re-evaluate communication's role in the overall scheme of organizational objectives and outcomes. Managers have persuasively argued that trainers and consultants do not see the overall picture, and do not link their research and programs to tangible results. These managers have asked tough questions about the real worth of communication efforts. They have challenged those of us in organizational communication to assess more carefully the organization as a whole, and to specify more carefully what communication can and cannot do in an organization.

In this paper we want to address the issue of effectiveness. First we discuss three specific attributes about the concept of effectiveness. Then we will explore the concepts of communication and organizational effectiveness.

ATTRIBUTES OF EFFECTIVENESS

Too many words in communication study, such as "process," "rule," "symbol," or even "communication," itself, have remained clothed in mystery and ambiguity. To try to clarify "effectiveness" we offer four characteristics of the concept.

1. Effectiveness is goal-related.

Webster's defines effectiveness as "bringing about some goal or purpose." Thus effectiveness is determined by how closely the result approximates the goal. If the goal of a basketball team is to win a game, then they have been effective when they win.

2. Effectiveness is multi-dimensional.

Since effectiveness is tied to goals, an organization may have several dimensions of effectiveness, just as it may have multiple goals. The same overall organization may have simultaneous goals of increasing profits, maintaining employee satisfaction, and enhancing corporate credibility in the marketplace. Thus effectiveness is not a single-dimension global concept but rather a web of interrelated goal relationships.

3. Effectiveness is a perceived phenomenon.

Effectiveness does not exist somewhere as an entity in a vacuum. It exists only as it is evaluated by those in the organization. This fact that effectiveness is perceived implies that effectiveness will be perceived differently by various organizations and groups. We spoke above of an organization's having multiple overall organizational objectives. It is also true that within any organization, different levels and subgroups may have varying, and even conflicting, goals. Management may have a goal to increase profits, while labor may have a goal to

increase wages. Groups also have different communication goals. The advertising department may value speed of transmission most highly because their goal is to beat the competitor. Another department may stress accuracy because they will have to deal with the repercussions of inaccurate information. Since they have different goals, these groups will have different evaluations of the effectiveness of an organizational strategy because it will impact their individual goals differently. Even among groups which have the same goal, there will be some disagreement on effectiveness simply because of individual differences.

4. Effectiveness is a time-dependent phenomenon.

Effectiveness can be viewed in a number of different time frames. What may be seen as effective in the short run, may be quite ineffective in the long run. Also, since effectiveness is tied to goals, it is dynamic as goals are dynamic. Goals change with the position and needs of a company or organization, and so what is considered effective must change. Thus care must be taken to assess effectiveness within specified time frames.

COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS

In the broadest sense, we might view communication effectiveness as the degree to which the response to a message is in line with the goals of the communicator. We use the word "communicator" in the broadest possible sense. It may refer to the organization as a whole, to upper management, or even to an individual manager. Perhaps Farace, Taylor, and Stewart (1978) express the idea of communication effectiveness best in their hallmark article in Communication Yearbook II:

> Communication effectiveness can be defined in general as the degree to which the response to a message transmission event is consonant with the overall objectives of the initiator of the event. Thus, from an individual's point of view, communication is effective when the receiver complies with the intent of the source's message. From a managerial viewpoint, communication is effective when subordinates as a group respond

> behaviorally in congruence with the manager's message; in such a case, the manager is thus able to accurately predict the outcome of the message that he or she disseminates, and can encourage that outcome through the message itself, the choice of medium, and the code system employed.

Farace, Taylor, and Stewart clearly emphasize the outcomes of the communication event. Each outcome is compared with the goal or purpose to determine effectiveness. This conclusion suggests that to understand communication effectiveness, we should look at the purposes of a communication event.

But what are the purposes of communication in the organization? Unfortunately, there is no simple answer to the question. Scholars have viewed the purposes of communication in many different ways. We will here analyze three ways that communication scholars have looked at the purpose of communication in organizations: by schools of thought, by functions of organizational communication, and by levels of the hierarchy.

Purpose of communication by schools of thought

Different organizational theorists have developed schools of thought on the nature of an effective organization. These schools of thought have various notions about the purpose of communication in the organization.

For the classical theorist, the function of communication is to provide the workers with adequate information and directives to get the task completed in the most efficient manner. Thus communication effectiveness is determined by the degree to which workers receive the information necessary to perform their jobs. The human relations school of organizational theory contends that the purpose of organizational communication is to motivate. This school would have a goal of greater interpersonal communication competence. Thus, as the organization's members acquire more interpersonal and human relations skills, they become more effective communicators. Systems theorists seek to provide accurate and relevant information to decision makers. They concentrate on the input, throughput, and output of environmental

information. The objective of communication, according to this school is to provide efficient information transfer and processing. So communication effectiveness is determined in light of the organization's ability to process information. Finally, the contingency school argues that there is no one view of the purpose of communication. Indeed the organization must determine what types of outcomes it desires from the communication system.

Purpose of communication by function

Thayer (1968) has answered the question of the purpose of communication in the organization more directly by identifying four functions of communication within the organization. 1) The Information Function allows each member of an organization to adapt to his environment, to cooperate with other members, and to fulfill organizational purposes. Thayer sees information as crucial to the process of organizing and to maintenance of the organization. 2) The Command and Instructive Function allows superiors to tell subordinates how to do certain things, or to command the employees in various ways. This function is also important for the smooth functioning of any hierarchically-structured organization. 3) The Influence and Persuasive Function allows any other member of an organization to sway or influence the thoughts or attitudes or behavior of others. Sometimes superiors may wish to influence rather than command. Also peers or subordinates may make use of persuasion and influence to achieve cooperation or change in the organization. 4) The Integrative Function may operate on several levels to organize information for the individual. The information may integrate views about self for the individual or may help to integrate groups or larger organizations. It thus serves a maintenance function.

Therefore Thayer might advance the idea that determination of communication effectiveness depends on its particular function within the organization. Communication can be considered effective to the extent that it furthers one or more of these functions.

Purpose of communication by level

Belle Bernstein (1975) develops a conceptual framework of an organization composed of four interdependent levels; the individual, the human system, the organizational system, and the environmental system. Purposes of communication may be defined very differently at these interlocking levels. The purpose of communication for the individual in the organization might be social in a given instance, while the goal at the organizational level might be increased job knowledge leading to productivity. These purposes vary, yet they intertwine as the individuals have their goals satisfied within the organization, and the organization has its goals satisfied through the individuals which comprise it. To summarize, purpose may be defined differently at the various levels of the organization. A given communication may be more effective when evaluated at one level than at another. Yet all the levels must strive to satisfy goals simultaneously because they are all part of one another.

To answer our initial question, "What is the purpose of communication in an organization?" we would be forced to answer, "It depends." The purpose of communication may depend on the philosophical school one embraces, the function at which one looks, or the level one examines. The discussion of these contingencies reinforces our contention that effectiveness is a multi-faceted and perceptual phenomenon. It is impossible to analyze the communication effectiveness of an organization, unless we adopt an explicit perspective.

Communication may have different purposes according to the view adopted by the observer. Yet, whatever the goal, communication is mediated by a number of variables. These variables affect whether communication achieves its purpose. Farace et. al. (1968) develop a list of critical communication variables that affect communication outcomes:

1. The structure of the message movement or the communication network.
2. The nature of the messages.
3. The communicators involved in the communication process.
4. The nature of the media or communication channels used in the organization.

To summarize our discussion, communication effectiveness is the degree to which communication fulfills its purpose. The purpose of communication within the organization may vary, depending on the school of thought, organizational function, or hierarchical level, to name only three perspectives. A number of mediating factors may come between the communication and goal attainment. These factors include networks, messages, communicators, and media.

ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Following our pattern, we would define organizational effectiveness as the extent to which the organization is successful in meeting its goals. Some organizational communication scholars have defined the formula for organizational effectiveness rather simplistically. For example, Argyris (1958) defines a healthy organization as one which provides meaningful work for its employees. Other consultants have stressed that the key to effectiveness is participative decision making.

However, we have stressed throughout that the concept of effectiveness should be seen in its complexity. Organization effectiveness can be seen as a multi-faceted concept. Likert (1967) has described four organizational outcomes:

1. Profits.
   Profits are defined as maximizing the monetary gains or investments.
2. Job satisfaction.
   Organizations may seek to assure that employees are satisfied or pleased with their work.
3. Productivity.
   The organization may seek to increase the amount or quality of products produced by the organization.
4. Labor-management relations.
   The organization may seek to maximize the working relationships vertically as well as horizontally.

Likert would then define organizational effectiveness as the extent to which an organization achieves these outcomes, or at least the ones which are most important to any given organization.

Hellriegel and Slocum (1974) also offer a multiple goal approach, but from a slightly different perspective. They also identify four types of organizational goals:

1. Societal goals
   Production of goods and services that are needed by society.
2. Output goals
   This category deals with types of consumer goods, educational services and the like.
3. System goals
   This refers to a desired state or condition of an organization. For example, an emphasis on growth, fiscal policy, stability, profits.
4. Product goals
   The characteristics of goods and/or services being produced. For example an emphasis on quality, quantity, availability, uniqueness, and innovativeness of products.

These goals not only consider an organization's desired outcomes, but also how the organization fits into societal goals.

Of course the perspectives we developed under communication effectiveness regarding schools of thought and hierarchical levels would certainly apply to organizational effectiveness as well. The different schools would define a healthy or effective organization in contrasting manners. Also, effectiveness might be assessed differently by researchers looking at various levels of an organization.

The point we wish to draw from these different schemas of organizational goals and criteria of effectiveness is simply that, again, effectiveness is a complex, multi-faceted concept. It is also perceptual in the sense that people with different organizational goals, or even with the same goals, may express different ideas as to whether a given organization is effective.

INTERACTIONS

A nagging question still remains. That is, what factors lead to organizational effectiveness? Organizational communication scholars have often assumed that communication practices are the major factors affecting such outcomes. Johnson (1979) goes so far as to call communication the very process of organizing. Yet we would be naive to assume that communication is the only variable affecting organizational outcomes. Farace (1977) sounded the caution in granting communication too extensive a role in determining organizational success or failure:

> A particularly glaring example of an inappropriate use of communication is the assertion that 'everything is communication,' and that all organizational problems are therefore communication problems. Taking such a position is nonsensical; to equate all organizational activity with communication renders one of the terms unnecessary. In particular, this view eliminates the concept of communication from further use as an explanatory or analytic device. For communication to be a useful diagnostic and evaluative concept in organizational settings, we must be able to differentiate between problems that are primarily communication related and those that are not. (p. 7).

We must see communication in the context of other variables affecting organizational effectiveness. When we intervene in an organization to analyze communication practices, we must realize that altering communication patterns may affect many aspects of organizational performance.

To attempt to conceptualize communication as highly interrelated with other organizational functions, we offer a model for communication analysis within an organization. We offer a diagram of our model in Figure 1.

EXPLANATION OF MODEL

Our model consists of four stages or organizational/communication analysis, with a feedback loop allowing for self-monitoring and control within the organization. At each stage of analyses, we have suggested appropriate questions to guide analysis and planning. Evident in the model is our belief that the sequencing, scope, and nature of questions asked by the researcher form the basis

for the plan of communication he/she will design for the organization.

The first step in the model is the planning stage. In this phase, the researcher must gather information. He/she must determine goals of the organization, and their order of priority. To determine these goals, the researcher may use traditional research-gathering techniques such as questionnaires and interviews. As we discussed previously, some organizations may have multiple goals. When this is true, the researcher must attempt to determine which goals have the highest priority. When there is lack of consensus on what goals are the most important, the researcher must rely on those in policy-making positions within the organization. After uncovering the goal hierarchy of the organization, the researcher must begin to conceptualize how communication interfaces with these goals. Different functions of communication may gain pre-eminence given certain goal hierarchies. For example if the primary goal within an organization at one point in its development is to enhance satisfaction among its members, then the integrative function of communication may become the focus.

A third issue of importance in analysis is consideration of the role that various levels of the organization play in formulation and attainment of goals. The researcher needs to ascertain, for example, if the goals apply equally to all departments in a company. For example a communication goal of stricter accountability might be more appropriate for an assembly line than for a research department. The analyst also needs to determine if goals attained at one level will actively block achievement of goals at another level. For example, in some instances achievement of higher productivity, desired by management, may interfere with good worker relations, desired by rank and file laborers. In the case of differential communication needs or conflicting goals by levels, the overall communication plan, described in the next stage, may need to contain multiple and flexible strategies.

A final issue to be considered in the initial planning step is the existence of internal or external constraints that will inhibit goal attainment. We

previously stressed that communication is not the only factor to be considered in evaluating organizational success. Many factors may influence organizational effectiveness that increased communication efficiency cannot solve. Goldhaber (1979) lists several contingencies that may affect organizational performance. Internal contingencies include structure, diversity of output, demographic characteristics of members, spaciotemporal characteristics, and traditions of the organization. External constraints listed by Goldhaber include economic climate, technological innovation, legal regulation, social, political, and cultural climate, and environmental considerations. Unless the communication researcher is aware of these constraints and incorporates them into his communication plan for the organization, his plan may be sabotaged from the start.

In the second stage of communication analysis the researcher takes the information gathered in the first step and shapes the data into concrete communication strategies. In the first step, the researcher has determined what functions of communication are most central in achieving organizational goals. In this step the analyst determines what specific communication techniques can best fill the communication function in meeting the needs of the organization. The prerequisite for such ability to specify appropriate communication strategies is a data base in which the organizational outcomes of various communication strategies are detailed. At present communication consultants do not have access to such data. Organizational communication research has too rarely linked communication practices to end results. Studies have informed us how to improve communication--to increase co-orientation, to improve listening, to increase circulation of "tokens,"--but these studies have not taken the next step to indicate what this "improved communication" means to the organization. Some critics might argue that the model of communication analysis presented in this paper is untenable because we do not presently have adequate data to allow us to determine what communication strategies will best meet organizational goals. We would make the

counterargument that communication research will not emphasize organizational results until our models of communication analysis calls for such data. Thus we believe that such a model of organizational intervention will serve heuristically to encourage more practical organizational communication research.

In the third main stage of analysis, the organizational analyst actually implements the strategies conceived in step two. One could think of these strategies, as they are developed in step two, as an ideal plan, the strategies that, in the absence of restraints, would be most likely to yield desired organizational outcomes. However this ideal plan may have to be modified in actual practice. So in stage three the consultant must determine how the ideal plan should be adapted for the particular organization. The researcher must consider what strategies are the most efficient and feasible, given resources and personnel. He/she must also decide how the overall plan should be adapted for various levels, departments, or branches of the organization.

Finally, in step four, the researcher follows up communication plan after it has been implemented. Too often this step is omitted in organizations due to resource and time constraints. Yet we feel that such follow-up is essential. Previously we argued that effectiveness is a time-dependent phenomena. What is effective in the short-term might not be in the long run. Without regular evaluation of communication strategies, it would be impossible to determine if such strategies were meeting organizational goals or if those goals were continuing to be functional for the organization. The researcher must evaluate the ability of communication plans to attain the highest priority goals of the institution. He/she should also examine unintended effects of communication policies to see if they have adverse effects on some levels of the organization or on alternate goals of the institution. Finally the researcher must always consider cost and efficiency, conducting frequent cost/benefit analyses.

Based on information gained in the followup, the analyst may choose to make changes in communication strategies. These revisions may take the researcher back to step one, as he rethinks goals and constraints with the organization. Yet this cyclical nature of communication should not be misinterpreted as meaning that the whole cycle has been in vain. By going through these stages, the consultant has helped the organization to refine its goals and has sharpened the choice of communication strategies to those that optimally meet the organization's needs at that given point in time.

ADVANTAGES OF MODEL

We see this contingency model of organizational analysis contrasting sharply with many other schemes of organizational intervention. Most of the approaches which are lumped under the general heading of "human resource management" tend to call for patterned intervention in organizations. By "patterned" we mean that the analysts operating under such models go into organizations with apriori notions of what the organization should be. For example, Likert, McGregor and Argyris have all developed ideal organizational types which include greater participation by employees. They impose this ideal type on whatever organization they are studying at the time. The approach we advocate in this paper is markedly different from such packaged systems. We suggest that communication strategies should be individually constructed for companies, taking into account the complexity of organizational and communication effectiveness. We think our approach is superior for six reasons: 1) It is more tailored to the needs of individual organizations; 2) The model considers organizational constraints; 3) The model makes economics and efficiency an integral part of communication planning; 4) The model recognizes the instrumental nature of communication and emphasizes the link between communication and end products for the organization; 5) The model recognizes the multidimensional nature of organizations, goals, and communication; and 6) The model builds in system evaluation and feedback.

First, our model is more tailored to the needs of individual organizations. We explained above how our approach is more individualized than most traditional interventions which interpret the organization from a priori judgments of organizational effectiveness. We might highlight the differences by characterizing our model as an inductive approach whereas many traditional approaches have been deductive, starting with a generalized formula and applying it to individual cases. The first part of this paper forms the foundation for arguing that an individualized approach is superior. Organizational effectiveness is multidimensional. Organizations have many goals they wish to achieve, and these goals may differ from organization to organization. No one strategy can achieve all organizational goals. In fact Downs and Pickett (1977) found that communication strategies aimed at achieving one goal may actively inhibit attainment of other desired outcomes. Therefore it becomes imperative for the organizational analysts to specify targeted outcomes and to tailor communication strategies to attain that goal.

The second advantage of this model is its consideration of constraints that may inhibit goal achievement. Steers (1977) points out that many models fail to consider that constraints exist in the organizational environment that may block complete goal attainment. He explains that a more realistic approach to studying organizations is by considering goal optimization:

> In other words, instead of evaluating success in terms of the extent to which goal attainment has been maximized, we recognize a series of identifiable and irreducible constraints (for example, money, technology, personnel, and so on) that serve to inhibit goal maximization. When these constraints are recognized and accounted for, it is then possible to identify the resulting optimized goals. (that is, an organization's desired goals as constrained or modified by available resources). (p. 5)

It is only when we begin to consider constraints that we can begin to develop realistic communication strategies that can aid in goal optimization.

A third advantage of our model is related to the second--that is, the model takes economics and efficiency into account in planning communication priorities. In his comparative analysis of several organizational design approaches, Mackenzie (1980) criticizes organizational communication research. He feels that current communication research considers efficiency and improved relationships, but does not focus on effectiveness. In other words, we have truncated our analysis to relationships and communication effectiveness without considering how these variables relate to the organization. Perhaps we as researchers have been remiss in centering more completely on communication than the manager can. No manager can afford to institute a new communication program without some idea of its effect on the productive capacity of the organization and upon the unit's budget. We therefore incorporate financial considerations into our model, both at the implementation and followup stages of analysis.

Fourth, our model is advantageous because it recognizes the instrumental function of communication and emphasizes the link between communication and end products of an organization. If there is anything we have emphasized in this paper it is the need for organizational communication research to become more pragmatic. We believe that we must begin to link communication effectiveness to organizational effectiveness. Our model offers a conceptual interrelation of the two variables, which will hopefully serve a heuristic function of promoting research which is effects-centered.

Fifth, our model recognizes the multidimensionality of organizations and goals, which we explained in depth earlier in the paper. The model recognizes the systemic nature of organizations. It forces the researcher to adapt implementation of communication programs to various levels of the organization and also to monitor the effects of communication plans at various levels.

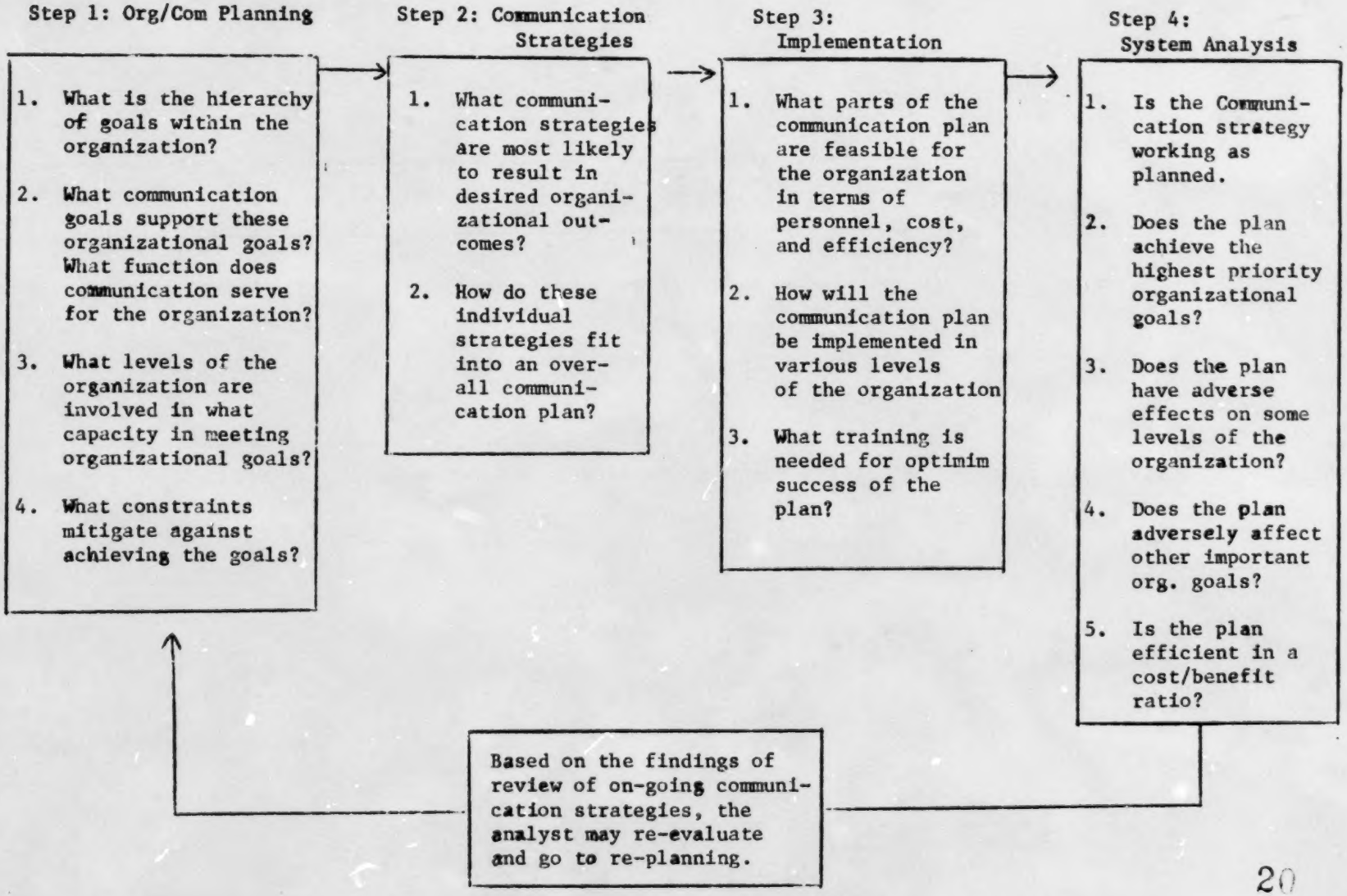
Finally our model is advantageous because it incorporates system evaluation and feedback into the analysis process. This feature of the model recognizes the cyclical nature and temporality of communication programs. No strategy can meet

an organization's needs indefinitely. Organizational goals and communication functions change as the organization evolves. Only a model which allows for adaptation and change can prevent the "overhaul syndrome" in which a new communication specialist is called into an organization every three to four years to implement a new grand strategy. This "overhaul syndrome" approach is costly and destructive of morale within an organization. Employees soon become cynical when they are exposed to an endless parade of "communication strategies to end all strategies."

SUMMARY

We have attempted in this paper to probe the interrelations between communication effectiveness and organizational effectiveness. We feel too many communication researchers have seen the two terms as synonymous to the detriment of practical communication programs. Both communication and organizational effectiveness are goal-related, multi-dimensional perceptual phenomena operating through time and on different levels of the organization. We have presented a model which attempts to integrate communication into organizational effectiveness, a model which will allow the communication analyst to offer assistance in the on-going operations of the organization. A major implication in our discussion of the model is the need for research which specifies organizational outcomes of effective communication.

Figure 1: Model of Communication Analysis


Step 1: Org/Com Planning
1. What is the hierarchy of goals within the organization?
2. What communication goals support these organizational goals? What function does communication serve for the organization?
3. What levels of the organization are involved in what capacity in meeting organizational goals?
4. What constraints mitigate against achieving the goals?
Step 2: Communication Strategies
1. What communication strategies are most likely to result in desired organizational outcomes?
2. How do these individual strategies fit into an overall communication plan?
Step 3: Implementation
1. What parts of the communication plan are feasible for the organization in terms of personnel, cost, and efficiency?
2. How will the communication plan be implemented in various levels of the organization
3. What training is needed for optimim success of the plan?
Step 4: System Analysis
1. Is the Communication strategy working as planned.
2. Does the plan achieve the highest priority organizational goals?
3. Does the plan have adverse effects on some levels of the organization?
4. Does the plan adversely affect other important org. goals?
5. Is the plan efficient in a cost/benefit ratio?
Based on the findings of review of on-going communication strategies, the analyst may re-evaluate and go to re-planning.

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